

Usability Test: Top Textbooks

Recommendations

1. Expand search capability to search across additional fields
2. Rearrange and reorganize the page view
3. Redesign the view of each textbook's information
4. Provide messages clarifying the limited function of 'request' for undergraduate students

Background

The Top Textbooks interface is a list of all of the textbooks available for students to check out for short periods of time (3 hours). It includes textbooks from the top 100 largest courses at Duke, so it is a page that is used by a lot of Duke's students.

The current interface was created using Airtable, and there are some accessibility and usability concerns with the design of the interface.

This usability study is being used to understand how students and staff use the interface and to make recommendations for improvements to the design, by collecting user feedback and comments.

Participants

There were five participants who joined the usability study for the Top Textbooks site, including two undergraduate students, one Ph.D. student, and two DUL ADS staff members. Two additional students signed up but did not show up. None of the three students who took the study had used the site before, while the two staff members were primary stakeholders for the site. The tests were conducted over Zoom and recording for notetaking purposes.

Key findings

There are three main findings from the study, with one sub finding.

First, all participants pointed out problems with the search bar, including the lack of functionality and the visual design. The Airtable interface itself does not include a search, so students used the search box in the masthead menu at the top of the page (Figure 1). That search box searches the library catalog and the library website, but it does not search the Top Textbooks Airtable display on the page. Because of this, using the masthead search bar only searches the textbooks' title, and users cannot search other data fields, including 'course ID,' 'course title,' 'tutor name,' 'author name,' or substring of the 'textbook name,' etc. Also, since the masthead search is designed to appear on every page without being too prominent, the search bar is small and difficult for the users to notice. The screenshot of the search bar is followed, marked out in red:

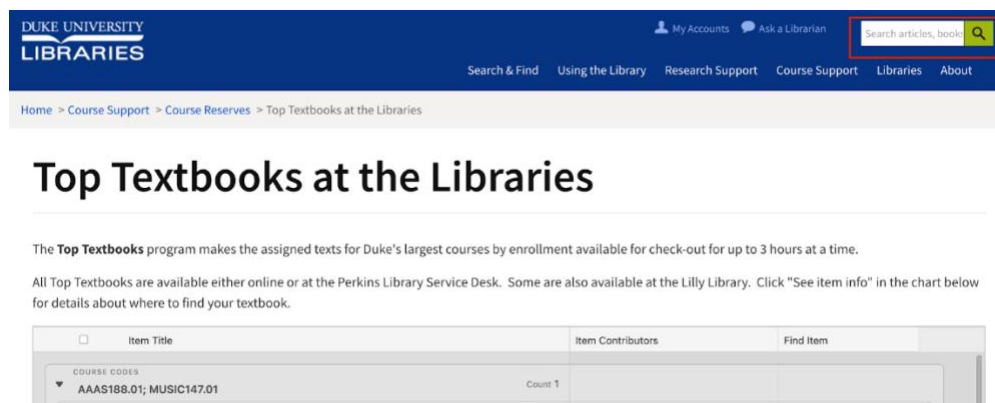


Figure 1: Screenshot of the search bar

Second, three of the five participants mentioned the layout, or in other words, the lack of the ability to narrow the number of results displayed. The Airtable interface lists all Top Textbooks results in the same page, with no filters or search. Users did not appreciate having to scroll down the whole long page. Separating textbooks from one page to multiple pages and only keeping ~20-30 books per page could be a better solution.

Third, the design and view of each textbook's information needs to be more user-friendly. First, we need to highlight the 'see item info' and design it to be more noticeable but taking less space. The screenshot of the 'see more info' link is attached below:



Figure 2: Screenshot of the 'see item info' link

In addition to that, students need additional help understanding the status/availability of the textbook. When students click on the "See item info" link, they are typically taken to the library catalog. An item page in the library catalog includes a large "Request" button (Figure 3). That button allows patrons with certain permissions to have a book delivered from one location to another. For the Top Textbooks program, however, students cannot use the request feature to put a book on hold. Students need to find the "Reserve Textbook" copy in the list under "Where to find it." In some cases, this may require scrolling down the page (Figure 4), and students may miss this step entirely.

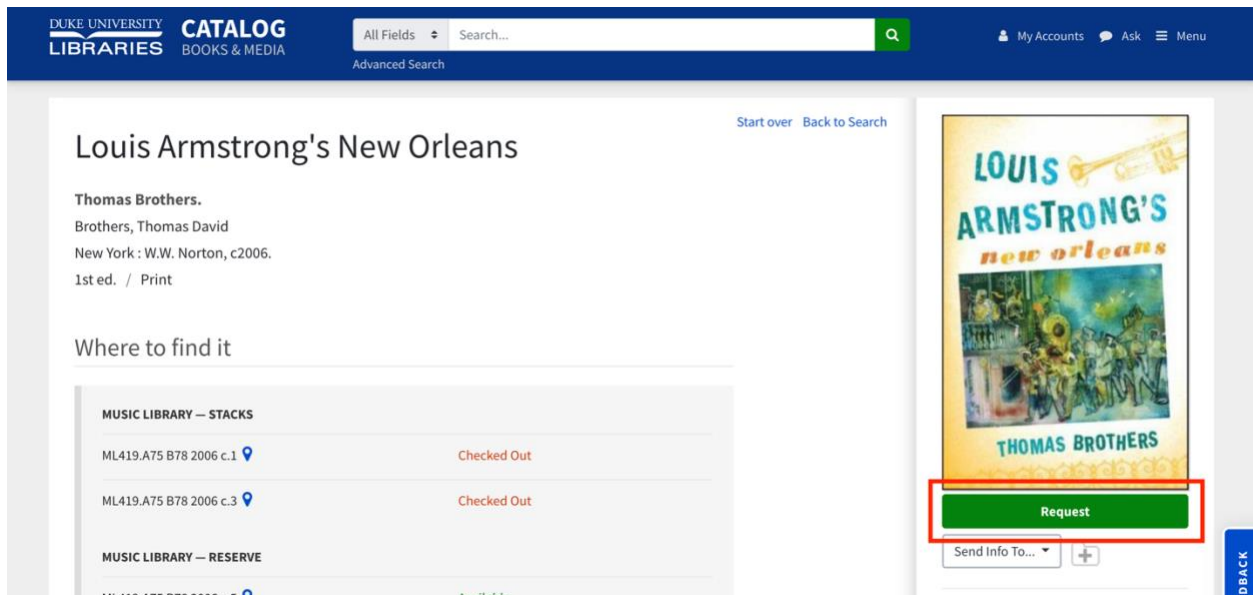


Figure 3: Screenshot of the Request button

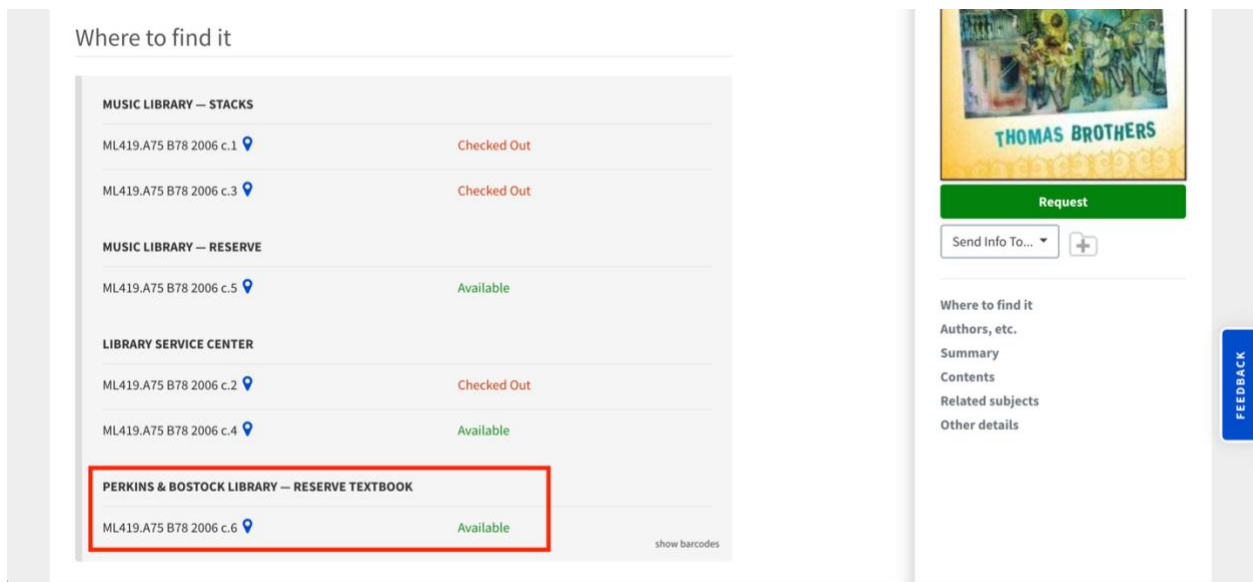


Figure 4: Screenshot of the 'Reserve Textbook' record

To reduce confusion, the Airtable interface could include a cell indicating the status/availability of the textbook. Another option would be to bring the location information into the Airtable interface and remove the need for students to go to the catalog record. A final option might be to include better instructions on the Top Textbooks page so students learn how to find the location of the book in the catalog and then request the book in person.

Also, the 'request' function is not available for undergraduate students. Two participants who were undergraduate students tried to request the book after they clicked the 'see item info' link and were taken to the catalog, but they were given an undefined error pop-up window. In addition to fixing the error, additional messaging could be added to explain who can use the service.

Appendix A: Top Textbooks usability test script

The test included nine questions and one website task. Questions were:

1. Pre-task:
 1. the participants' relationship to Duke;
 2. whether it was their first time using the site;
 3. what their first impression of the site;
2. Task
 1. Now I'd like you to pretend you need to borrow a textbook for a class called _____. Show me how you would use the site to accomplish this task, and please try to explain what you are thinking out loud as you are working with the site.
3. Post-task:
 1. what were the most important tasks to them;
 2. whether the site provide the information that they needed;
 3. was there any more functions or features they expected;
 4. one thing they liked the most;
 5. one thing they disliked the most;
 6. any suggestions for the site's improvements.